

## The Stateless Society Fights Back

Life without a state? Really? Answers to common questions.

by [Stefan Molyneux](#)

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My recent articles on the stateless society have generated some fascinating feedback. Questions, issues and criticisms rained heavy on my inbox – here are some of the more challenging queries I received, and my responses.

### Question #1: Mass Pollution

*In my own discussions with friends and such about anarchy, there is one sticking point where I have had trouble finding the anarchic solution, so I wonder if you might have an idea about it. I guess you could call it distributed pollution. There are many examples of pollution where each polluter does not contribute much to the total, but there are enough polluters that the total pollution is a problem for everyone.*

Cars are an obvious example here: it's cheaper for everyone to pollute individually, but collectively we all suffer. There are two solutions to this problem; one economic and the other social.

The economic answer is that in a stateless society, people will take out insurance against ailments such as asthma, cancer and so on. Thus any air pollution which causes illness will increase the costs for insurers, since they will have to pay out for treatment and life insurance. If pollution-related health problems are projected to cost insurers \$100 million over the next ten years, they can spend up to \$99.9 million on reducing air pollution – in other words, they can pay car manufacturers/gasoline companies/road owners up to \$99.9 million to reduce pollution and *still* come out ahead. (Of course, they can also refuse to pay out claims, which will put them out of business pretty quickly!)

The most logical approach would be to allocate the costs of reducing air pollution to those who generate it. DROs (Dispute Resolution Organizations; private insurance mediators) would likely charge drivers and manufacturers for the costs of reducing air pollution – and would structure the contracts so that it would be cheaper to simply reduce pollution than for the DRO to pay for its consequences. Also, remember that car pollution is currently high because road use is "free" to the user, which increases consumption. If car users have to pay for *all* the costs of driving (roads, pollution etc), use will decline.

If that answer doesn't satisfy you, no problem – in the free market, there are as many solutions as there are interested parties! Here's another. Let's say that for some reason DROs didn't care about the rising costs of air pollution. The first thing I would do is start a Clean Air Company, which would, for a fee, guarantee air quality in certain neighborhoods. How would I achieve this lofty end? Simple: emotional advertising and social pressure. First, I would start running ads showing kids and grandmothers keeling over from asthma. Then I would offer bright yellow "clean air" stickers to anyone who signed up for my program – and for cars which met certain low-pollution guidelines. That way, anyone in a neighborhood who didn't sign up for my clean air program would be highly visible – all their neighbors would know, and social pressure would do the rest.

Don't believe me? I have two proofs. The first is the fact that waiters are almost always tipped – despite the fact that everyone who doesn't tip is a "free rider." If you think the "tipping" example requires face-to-face

contact, what about tsunami charities? Billions raised, and almost none of those who gave will ever meet the recipients of their generosity.

Finally, governments don't deal effectively with pollution anyway. The Canadian government eradicated the Newfoundland cod population through subsidized over-fishing. The most polluted lands in the US are owned by the government. Logging is a problem because the government won't sell the land outright, just the timber harvesting rights, which provides little incentive for renewal. If global warming is occurring, Kyoto barely slows it down; if it isn't, Kyoto is a huge waste of time and money – the worst of both worlds. Public property is always taken care of badly – and in the stateless society, there is no such thing as public property, since there is no such thing as a government.

So – DROs would pay to reduce pollution, drivers would pay the full costs of driving, and a clean air company would use powerful and proven social pressures to make sure money was available for pollution reduction. Is it ideal? Perhaps. Could it be better? Sure – those are just my ideas. In a free market, thousands of the best minds will be working to solve the problem of "free rider" pollution. If the problem *can* be solved, it will be. If it *can't*, let's stop using the government to pretend that it can!

To sum up: if people care about mass pollution, it will be solved. If they don't, then those uncaring people will also be running the government – and so it won't be solved by the state either.

## Question #2: Invasion

*I liked your article, but the practical reality is that under anarchy, the few "evil" men would band together and plunder the "good" majority. How many well-armed, coordinated thugs would it take to ravage an unprotected populace – a few thousand? The good people simply go about their business, then one day, 2,000 armed evildoers sweep into an area, and have their way with it. Even if the general populace were armed, they could hardly stand up to a trained group like this. (BTW, this is what the gun lobby doesn't seem to understand – if the government goes after them with 10,000 soldiers, a "well-armed militia" has not the ghost of a chance.)*

*Eventually the good group might eliminate the evil group through sheer weight of numbers, but the former would probably lose men at a ratio of 10 to 1, since they will always be caught by surprise and fighting is not their stock-in-trade. This would be repeated constantly and is obviously unacceptable. Isn't this what Genghis Khan, and the Vikings, etc. were – essentially wandering thugs who plundered "good" civilizations?*

*A private security force would be irresistibly tempted to assume the "evil group" role, I'm sure, so this is no solution.*

*Believe me, I detest all governments; I just feel that there is one valid role for government to play, and that is to protect its citizens.*

The idea that roving bands of thugs will successfully "take over" a stateless society is a surprisingly durable notion, given the disasters we see every day in Iraq. The simple fact is that *invasions are never profitable unless subsidized by the taxpayers of the invading army's government*. From a mere financial standpoint, Iraq is a fiscal disaster – which proves that even invading one of the most oil-rich countries in the world doesn't pay! Iraq was invaded only because the *costs* of the invasion are entirely borne by taxpayers – which allows billions to be siphoned off to the military, state agencies and private corporations. The same is true for all occupations in history, from the Roman, British and French Empires to the Eastern Bloc to the

Iraq occupation. Taxpayers are forced to pay with money and blood, while billions are stolen through subsidies and contracts. The real target in *any* war is not foreign troops, but domestic taxpayers. War is a *means* to an end: the end being the pillaging of the public purse.

Free trade is profitable; in the absence of a state, war is not. This means that peaceful citizens will always have more money and resources than violent criminals. In a stateless society, DROs will constantly work to defuse and exclude the criminal element and ensure that crime does not pay – and it won't, since an honest income will be so much higher than it is now! Thus the argument that bands of thugs can successfully take over a free society has no basis in economics, logic or history. The *worst* possible case in a stateless society is that a band of thugs will set up shop locally and demand cash "protection" from honest citizens, like the Mafia. However, even *that* situation is preferable to the current system, since the Mafia need to ensure that their citizens remain relatively happy in the long run – unlike governments, which drive entire societies into war, bankruptcy and dictatorship.

All right, but what about foreign governments, whose armies *are* subsidized by taxpayers?

Foreign governments are even easier to deal with than internal gangs, due to one basic fact: *political leaders only invade other countries if they themselves are in no danger*. If a politician can stay far behind the lines, make stirring speeches, strike noble poses, hand out contracts and watch his popularity soar, war seems like a pretty good deal. If, however, declaring war threatens him personally, suddenly it doesn't seem so attractive. The simple proof of this thesis is that *no country possessing WMDs has ever been directly threatened with war*. (In fact, the best way to logically deduce that Iraq had no WMDs was that the US was prepared to invade it!)

Personal threats against warlike foreign leaders always dissuades invasion – so, what is the best way to threaten the lives of such criminals? So far, the only answer has been the proliferation of WMDs. In a free society, cheaper and less dangerous methods will surely be discovered – and here are some possibilities.

Suppose Canada decides to invade a government-free US. The Canadian PM starts making threatening speeches and massing troops along the border.

How could the stateless society respond? Well, DROs are the agencies most threatened by invasion, because if the Canadian government takes over, they will be the first to go. So let's put ourselves in the shoes of a group of worried DRO leaders. What would we do?

First, we would get to the root of the problem, which is that the *Canadian PM is the person responsible for fermenting war*. Given this fact, we would avoid threatening Canada's troops or its general population, who are *not* the problem, and have no power to prevent the invasion. If we threaten the troops, we'll make them more belligerent – and if we threaten the general population, we'll make them more supportive of the war.

So how can we defuse the situation? Here are some ideas (in escalating order):

1. Declare that, if the troops are not disbanded, no offensive action will be taken against soldiers or civilians, but instead political leaders will be targeted.
2. Arm everyone along the US side of the border with any weapons they liked – for free (In Switzerland, for instance, every household *has* to have a gun – and the Swiss have not been involved in a war in 800 years, despite being right in the middle of Europe!).
3. Offer the foreign troops sanctuary, property and jobs if they lay down their arms, desert and cross the border peacefully.
4. If the threat continues to escalate, offer \$100 million in gold to anyone who can convince the

Canadian PM to demobilize his troops (using whatever methods work the best).

5. Drive all politicians underground by putting massive bounties on their heads.

6. Kidnap the PM's family and hold them hostage until the troops are demobilized.

Naturally, things can escalate from the above in ways that are easy to imagine – although I am sure that the problem would be dealt by the first one or two items.

Why are these approaches so effective? For one thing, in a stateless society, there is no single target such as the White House or the Pentagon. Authority is diffused, decentralized, like the Internet, and so cannot be struck at directly. Thus DROs can target foreign leaders, but foreign leaders cannot target DROs – and so the advantage lies with DROs.

Let's suppose, though, that none of the above works, and foreign troops end up invading the stateless society. What will they face? A combination of determined DROs, private security forces and well-armed civilians. Remember: in a stateless society, there are no legal limits on the weapons that private citizens can possess. (It is likely that DROs, though, would refuse to represent those who possessed certain weapons – a limit that would doubtless be lifted in the case of imminent invasion!)

Thus the invading army cannot tell which citizens have which weapons. This raises a significant "fog of war" problem. The US felt safe invading Iraq because the Iraqi government had been largely disarmed by 14 years of sanctions, and so could not retaliate. Even now, when they are nominally in charge of the country, they face constant attrition from guerilla fighters. Now that the Iraqi population has access to arms, they have the upper hand even in the face of overwhelming US military power. (The main reason for this is that the US military has developed the capacity to blow away armies standing out in the open – with the inevitable result that no army ever opposes the US by standing out in the open, but instead uses guerilla tactics and a war of attrition. It's as if Vietnam never happened! But that's inevitable – state armies are not designed to protect citizens, but to create conflict and spend money, and "big thump" weapons are far more expensive than guerilla training.)

Last but not least, if the threat of invasion grows, DROs will hire mercenaries to repel the invaders. In the unlikely event that DRO combatants *do* actually engage government troops, it will be a case of private incentives versus government inefficiencies – FedEx versus the Post Office. Does anyone believe that a government-run army – which is just the Post Office in fatigues – can beat a private army? The military is just another government program, subject to all the same irrational stupidities as every other government program. So far, we have only seen the agonizing waste of governments fighting *other* governments – the spectacle of a government army fighting a private army will be brief, efficient and highly instructive.

Finally, can anyone out there show me *any* examples of a government successfully defending its population from violence? France in 1789? Russia in 1917? Germany in 1933? Poland in 1939? France in 1940? England which, after winning the war against national socialism, imposed socialism on its own population? America, which subsidizes and arms dictatorships and currently has more than 200 troop bases around the world stirring up anti-US rage? What about the Civil War, which murdered 600,000 Americans without even effectively freeing the slaves? The First World War, which caused the Second? Did America emerge from the Cold War *more* free or *less* free? (Hint: taxes, debt and regulations!) Did Korea or Vietnam end the Soviet regime? Of course not – the inefficiency of central planning did. What about World War Two? In 1950, *more* people were enslaved by dictatorships than in 1939 – despite 40 million murdered! So how can *anyone* say that governments protect their citizens? Violence begets violence. All states do is wage wars, raise taxes and enslave their populations with debts and regulation.

Knowing that governments murdered 170 million people during the 20th century, we can all be forgiven for a little skepticism when we hear the argument that governments protect their citizens. It is blind, dangerous nonsense!

There is one final response that, in my view, disposes of the "armed gang" objection. If large numbers of people *do* want to impose their will on others through force, then armed gangs do pose a risk to a stateless society. However, they are still *less* of a risk than a centralized state! If an armed gang runs roughshod through your neighbourhood, you can choose to fight, pay tribute, or flee to a freer locale. No such choices exist with a government. In other words, if people are generally peaceful, we don't need a state – and if they are generally violent, we can't allow a state to exist, because giving violent people a monopoly always results in the utter destruction of civil society.

### **Question #3: Inertia**

*People often prefer the evil they know to the evil they don't know. Even though being ruled by the state is awful, it is possible that the alternative is worse. Even if the probability that alternative is worse is small, people do not want to risk what they have for something else, at least not until what they have is so bad as to be unendurable. This is a facet of human nature that the evil in our world exploit on a daily basis. They continue to make things worse slowly in the hopes that people will simply go along with it because they do not wish to risk the alternatives. I know this is bad logically, but most people are ruled by emotions rather than reason and act accordingly. The fear of the unknown is one of the most powerful emotions. Fear is why people continue to support the state even though they acknowledge that it is evil.*

I agree with the above – it is usually easier to live with a tolerable (and well-armed!) evil than risk opposing it. However, I have two arguments against this kind of passivity. First of all, government power grows continually, becoming more and more brutal, until it utterly destroys the host society. This was the case in Ancient Greece and Italy, in Germany, England and France after the Middle Ages, in Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and China in the 20th century – and is currently the case with all Western governments. In every single historical case, governments grow until they destroy society. In most cases, governments run out of money, which causes violence to erupt from those dependent on state handouts – resulting in martial law and a general dictatorship. Thus the idea of "living with a tolerable evil" is like "living with a tolerable hunger" – it is only tolerable in the short run. In the long run, the growth of state power murders millions and destroys everything that makes life worth living.

Secondly, there is absolutely no reason to risk one's life or remaining liberties opposing state power. The state survives on propaganda, and thus can only be opposed in the realm of ideas. Writing, reading and arguing are the most powerful activities in the service of freedom, since all general social decisions are made on the basis of perceived virtue (i.e. state welfare is "good" because it "helps the poor"). Change the perceived virtues, and you change the world.

### **Question #4: No Gun Control At All?**

*You can't have everyone having any weapon they want! People would just nuke each other!*

Naturally, most people are disturbed by the idea that anyone can have any weapon he wants – does that mean that my neighbor can build a nuke in his basement?

Those who are getting the hang of the stateless society already know the answer to this objection: *if enough people are troubled by this problem, someone will find a solution for it!*

Here's an example: I buy a tract of land and build a community on it. I then only lease the houses to people who are willing to sign a contract that they will *not* build nukes in their basement. (This could extend to any sort of weapon ownership, and is an extension of standard condo agreements.) Presto, I have a completely voluntary society with no nukes in the basement – or no handguns at all if I choose. No need for a government, policemen or the NRA. This way, everyone gets to live with the social rules they want – and the most efficient societies will flourish, just as companies in the free market do now. There is absolutely no reason why social rules should not be subject to the same market forces as everything else in the economy – everyone benefits through a multiplicity of choice and the principles of efficiency!

### **Question #5: How Do We Win?**

This question, of course, came up a *lot*, and requires a separate article, which I am working on. I won't mention any details here, except to say that we *can* win, and it requires no violence – but you're probably not going to like the answer!

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